

## BRIEF I. Major ECOSOC mandates and functions

*This brief is part of a series aimed to provide background information on ECOSOC strengthening. Briefs include (i) ECOSOC mandates and evolution of functions; (ii) policy dialogue and guidance; (iii) guiding and promoting a coherent and coordinated UN system; (iv) subsidiary bodies; (v) relationship with the General Assembly, Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council; (vi) countries in special situations; and (vii) addressing emergency issues.*

ECOSOC is concerned with an array of United Nations areas of action. The Council is the central mechanism for coordination of the activities of the United Nations system and its specialized agencies and overseeing the work of its subsidiary bodies in the economic, social, environmental and related fields. It is also the policy organ that promotes a coordinated follow-up to the outcomes of major international conferences and summits, guides and reviews efforts in the social, economic and related fields and oversees the majority of UN global data production.

The Council issues policy recommendations to Member States and the entities of the United Nations system, provides technical expertise, and adopts global standards. ECOSOC also serves as the United Nations bridge to civil society and the world of business and finance.

The mandates of ECOSOC originate from different sources, the most significant of which are those set out in the United Nations Charter, the outcomes of UN summits, and General Assembly resolutions. The Council has also accrued a body of practice and precedent related to the exercise of its responsibilities.

The primary mandate of the Economic and Social Council is defined by the United Nations Charter. The responsibilities of the United Nations in the area of international economic and social cooperation established by the Charter are “vested in the General Assembly and, under the authority of the General Assembly, in the Economic and Social Council”. The UN Charter mandates ECOSOC to promote higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress; solutions of international economic, social and health problems; international cultural and educational cooperation; and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

### « Early Years »

In its early years, the Council, worked throughout the year reviewing reports of various functional and regional commissions and committees, establishing relationship agreements with specialized agencies and reviewing their reports<sup>1</sup> and deliberating on important post-World War issues, such as the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons, expansion of the food supply, forced labour, the status of women, including the question of equal pay for equal work for men and women workers, full employment, among other pressing matters – which remain quite current today. With the expansion of membership of the United Nations and the increase in scope of international economic and social issues, agenda items were added, including on methods of financing development and technical assistance for developing countries. The rapid growth of technical assistance through international organizations also led to the need for the coordination of operational activities.

### « Major United Nations Conferences, Summits and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) »

The emergence of the conferences and summits of the 1990s and 2000s led to an evolution in ECOSOC’s role and functions. ECOSOC became a principal organ in the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields. These conferences and summits included the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992; the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994; the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995; the World Summit for Social Development in 1995; the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002; the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 and 2005; and the 2005 World Summit.

After these conferences and summits, the mandates of some of ECOSOC’s Functional Commissions were modified to allow them to implement the respective conferences’ programmes of action. This included the Commission on

<sup>1</sup> The reports of the specialized agencies presented a summary of trends in the sector covered and programmatic responses, their relationship with other UN agencies, their engagement with the Chiefs Executive Board and the appraisal of their work. The objective of the review of these reports was to see where the various programmes overlapped in various sectors and how they could be better coordinated.

the Status of Women, the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on Population and Development and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. The Commission on Sustainable Development – later replaced by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development - was also established after the 1992 UNCED for the follow-up to Agenda 21.

ECOSOC was given the task to ensure that conference follow-up is well integrated, coordinated and effective among countries and in its subsidiary bodies and the UN system. It does so by reviewing cross-cutting themes, drawing on the commitments adopted at these conferences as its organizing principles for monitoring progress and implementation.

The Millennium Summit of 2000 led to ECOSOC being given the role as the principal body for the review of the international development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 2005 World Summit assigned the Council the review of the implementation of the UN Development Agenda through Annual Ministerial Reviews and the Development Cooperation Forum. Through an annual theme and national voluntary presentations (the predecessors of the current voluntary national reviews), Member States were able to share lessons learned and best practices in implementing the MDGs. The Development Cooperation Forum emerged as a platform for development partners to assess cooperation strategies and policies and, in the process, promote greater coherence among them.

### « 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals »

Following the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, ECOSOC was tasked with becoming a more issues-oriented body capable of overseeing implementation sustainable development commitments. The Council was mandated to provide greater leadership and guidance on substantive priorities and fulfill a key role in achieving a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. With the establishment of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) convened under the auspices of ECOSOC every year and under the General Assembly every four years, Member States also underscored the importance of the Council and its subsidiary bodies in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Member States also gave ECOSOC the task to address the follow-up and review of the financing for development outcomes of past conferences and summits and the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda by creating the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development. The creation of this new Forum as part of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, adopted in July 2015, strengthened the previous arrangements for the follow-up to the financing development agenda. A Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, part of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, mandated by the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, was placed under the authority of the Presidency of ECOSOC.

### « ECOSOC and Resolution 75/290 A »

ECOSOC's diverse mandates and functions were reaffirmed in resolution 75/290 A. These functions include being a principal organ for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development and providing integrated policy guidance.

The resolution also created the Council's coordination segment, through which the Council steers the ECOSOC system towards an efficient and integrated workflow throughout the Council's cycle leading up to the high-level political forum on sustainable development and provides forward-looking policy guidance to ensure coherence and direction in the policies and normative work of subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies relating to the 2030 Agenda as well as to other aspects of the work of the Council.

### « Major ECOSOC Mandates »

United Nations Charter (1945): [Chapter IX](#): "International economic and social cooperation" and [Chapter X](#): "The Economic and Social Council"

[A/RES/32/197 \(1977\)](#): Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the UN System

[A/RES/45/264 \(1991\)](#): Restructuring and revitalization of the UN in the economic, social and related field's

[A/RES/48/162 \(1993\)](#): Further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the UN in the economic, social and related fields

- [A/RES/50/227 \(1996\)](#): Further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the UN in the economic, social and related fields
- [A/RES/53/12B \(1997\)](#): Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform
- [A/RES/55/2 \(2000\)](#): United Nations Millennium Declaration
- [A/RES/60/1 \(2005\)](#): World Summit Outcome Document
- [A/RES/61/16 \(2006\)](#): Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council
- [A/RES/66/288 \(2012\)](#): The Future We Want
- [A/RES/67/290 \(2013\)](#): Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development
- [A/RES/68/1 \(2013\)](#): Review of the implementation of GA resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council
- [A/RES/69/313 \(2015\)](#): Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development
- [A/RES/70/1 \(2015\)](#): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- [A/RES/70/299 \(2016\)](#): Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level
- [A/RES/72/305 \(2018\)](#): Review of the implementation of GA resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of the ECOSOC
- [A/RES/74/4 \(2019\)](#): Political Declaration of the HLPF convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (2019 SDG Summit)
- [A/RES/75/290 A and B \(2021\)](#):  
Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/305 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council  
Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and 70/299 on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level  
[75/290 A](#): Economic and Social Council  
[75/290 B](#): High-level political forum on sustainable development
- [A/RES/78/1 \(2023\)](#): Political Declaration of the HLPF convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (2023 SDG Summit)